DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 034 480 HE 001 202

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TITLE	The Prevalence and Value of Language Requirements for Graduate Degrees.
INSTITUTION	Hofstra Univ., Hempstead, N.Y. Center for the Study of Higher Education.
REPORT NO	Rep-81
PUB DATE	Sep 69
NOTE	10p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.60
DESCRIPTORS	*Degree Requirements, Degrees (Titles), Doctoral Degrees, *Graduate Study, *Higher Education, *Languages, Masters Degrees, *Second Languages

ABSTRACT

This report reviews some of the recent literature concerning the prevalence and value of graduate language requirements, and provides information about the requirements of 19 New York colleges and universities. In general, the literature reveals a liberalization of graduate language requirements. At the doctoral level, there are trends toward: increasing the number of acceptable languages, allowing other options to fulfill the requirements (such as proficiency in statistics or advanced mathematics), and allowing departmental control over requirements. At the master's level, the literature reveals conflicting reports, but there appears to be a gradual liberalization here also. Of the 19 New York schools that offered master's degrees, 11% had a university language requirement, 47% allowed departmental discretion, and 42% had no language requirement at this level. Language use in writing doctoral dissertations ranged from 0% in some fields to 35% in others, and in later research from 0% to about 60%. In general, knowledge of foreign languages was deemed important in the physical sciences, economics, English, and history, and was considered unimportant in the social sciences (except economics), the applied sciences, business, and education. The report is available from Center for the Study of Higher Education, Hofstra University, Hempstead, New York. (DS)

ED034480

Report No. 81
Sept. 1969

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

The Prevalence and Value of Language Requirements for Graduate Degrees

Emile Gurstelle and Harold E. Yuker

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the literature of the past fifteen years and a study of the catalogs of 19 schools in New York State that offer graduate degrees led to the following conclusions:

1. Although Berelson (1960) said that the language requirement at the Master's level "was typically discarded some years ago," Snell (1965) reported that 48% of the institutions he surveyed required Master's candidates in history to pass foreign language examinations. Of the 19 New York schools that offered Master's degrees, 11% had a University language requirement, 47% left it up to the departments, and 42% had no language requirements at this level.

2. At the doctoral level there was evidence of changes in the language requirement, almost all of the changes being in the direction of liberalizing or reducing the requirement. These changes included: (a) increasing the number of acceptable languages; (b) allowing departments to set up standards, give examinations, or even not require the examinations; and (c) allowing students to substitute tool courses or examinations for the language examinations. But almost all schools still have a language requirement.

3. Studies of the use of foreign languages either in preparing the doctoral dissertation or subsequent to the doctorate indicated wide differences among fields of study in estimates of use. Language use in writing the doctoral dissertation ranged from zero percent in some fields to about 35% in others. Reported use of foreign languages in later research ranged from zero to about 60%.

4. Most studies indicated wide divergence among the academic areas both with respect to attitudes toward the language requirement and actual use of the language in research. In general, knowledge of languages was deemed important in the science areas, in economics, English and history. Languages tended to be considered unimportant in most of the social sciences (except economics), the applied sciences (engineering and agriculture), business, and education. This would seem to indicate that departmental autonomy is desirable.

(Copies of the full report are available from the Center for the Study of Higher Education)

HE 001 202

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The Prevalence and Value of Language Requirements for Graduate Degrees

Emile Gurstelle and Harold E. Yuker

Introduction

In recent years there have been many debates concerning the nature and value of language requirements for advanced degrees. Although some data has been collected, much of the dispute has been based on rational arguments rather than empirical information. The present report reviews some of the recent literature relevant to questions concerning the prevalence and value of language requirements, and provides information about the language requirements of some New York area colleges and universities.

Prevalence

There is no definitive study of the prevalence of language requirements for graduate degrees. There have, however, been reports of the extent of language requirements within specific fields of study. These will be discussed chronologically, in order to put them in perspective.

In 1957 Viens and Wadsworth reported on a survey of 204 schools including all schools that granted Ph.D.'s and all that granted 30 or more Masters' degrees. The schools surveyed were said to represent at least 90% of the M.A., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees granted in the United States. They found that slightly less than half had a language requirement for a Master's degree. For the Ph.D., 97.5% had requirements for all departments (the exceptions were Harvard, Iowa, and Minnesota). Over 80% required two foreign languages for the degree (although some substitutions were permitted). About 25% permitted a substitution such as statistics for one language. Eighty percent had the language examination graded by the foreign language department.

In contrast to this data, Berelson (1960) said that there was a gradual softening of the language requirements for advanced degrees:

In the early decades of the century, the requirement was settled: two languages--first only French and German, then usually French and German. But since the 1930's, little by little, the requirement has been eroded, so that now, while two languages are still required at the majority of institutions, (1) they do not have to be French and German; (2) the examinations are increasingly given by the subject matter departments, thus making the requirement somewhat easier to fulfill; (3) one of the languages can increasingly be replaced by another "tool" such as mathematics or statistics...or by additional work in a related discipline; (4) the requirement is satisfied in some universities by a thorough knowledge of one language rather than two poorly mastered, and in others by one language, period; and (5) notably in education, but also in some other professional fields, the doctorate can now be secured with no foreign language at all. As for the language requirement at the Master's level, that was typically discarded some years ago.

In agreement with Viens and Wadsworth (1957), Rosenzweig, Bunch, and Stern in 1962 reported that all of the Psychology Ph.D.'s surveyed had been required to pass at least one language examination, and 76% had passed two such examinations. Similarly, John Snell (1965) noted:

> Forty-eight percent of the institutions require the (Master's) candidate in history to pass a foreign language examination. It is regrettable that slightly more than half do not, but the situation in the field of history does not quite support Berelson's (1960) conclusion that the language requirement at the Master's level "was typically discarded some time ago."

Also, in 1965, Prior, while not presenting data, said:

> The proponents of the (language) requirement (for the Ph.D.) are, however, in the majority, as is evidenced by the adherence of the major graduate schools to it in spite of modifications and liberalizations that may occur here and there, and there is little indication that the requirement will be eliminated completely.

In 1967, Admussen obtained information from graduate deans at 43 of the 46 schools belonging to the Association of Graduate Schools, in an attempt to determine what if any changes had been made in the Ph.D. language requirements over the past 10 years. Eighty-one percent of the deans reported that some changes had occurred. The indicated changes included: (1) 47% decreased the number of languages required; (2) 54% changed to give departments autonomy with respect to language requirements; (3) 20% changed to have the foreign language department certify proficiency, while 14% changed in the opposite direction to have the degree department certify proficiency; (4) 50% of the schools changed to the use of Educational Testing Service examinations (but set their own passing level). Admussen further stated that 40% of the departments were still not happy, and were contemplating further changes.

In an attempt to bring the data somewhat up to date, a survey of the language requirements of nineteen schools in the general area of New York City was undertaken. Data was gathered from the college catalogs of these schools. The schools and their requirements are listed in the Appendix. The data indicated that of the nineteen schools that offered work at the Masters' level, 42% had no language requirement, 47% had departmental requirements, and 11% had university-wide requirements. In contrast, at the Ph.D. level, only one school out of 15 (6%) had no language requirement. Fifty-four percent had a university-wide requirement and 40% had departmental requirements. The catalog survey further indicated that of the eight schools that had university-wide requirements, six (75%) required two languages. Each of the six schools would permit substitution of a tool subject such as statistics for <u>one</u> of the required languages.

Gustave Arlt (1969) writes in the <u>Encyclopedia of Educational Research</u> what may be considered an up to date summary of the current situation:

> (The doctoral student) is generally required... to demonstrate a reading knowledge of two foreign languages, usually French and German, although now Russian and several other languages may be substituted. In some institutions one of the language requirements may be satisfied by the passing of an examination in a tool subject, such as statistics or advanced mathematics.

This brief survey of the literature would seem to justify the following conclusions: (1) Although foreign language requirements are changing, almost all schools and all departments still have a language requirement for the Ph.D. (2) At the Master's level only about 50% of the schools have <u>some</u> departmental requirements. (3) There is a

definite trend toward having departmental requirements. (4) Many graduate schools use the Educational Testing Service examinations.

Value

Prior (1965) has pointed out that the Ph.D. language requirement originated in the nineteenth century when scholars began to go to Europe for advanced training. At that time knowledge of foreign languages was necessary in order to keep up with the latest developments in many fields. Much of the current dispute centers around questions of the extent to which these conditions still hold. To what extent does the scholar of today need to use a foreign language in his work? This question has been argued back and forth, with many cogent arguments and comparatively few data.

Several studies have reported on the extent of use of foreign languages either in the dissertation or in post Ph.D. research. A study reported in Business Education indicated that only 11% of over 1,000 doctoral candidates in education reported using a foreign language in their thesis research. Weitz et al. (1963) examined 270 doctoral dissertations published at Duke University from 1958-1961. They found an average of 13% foreign language references per dissertation, with the percentage varying greatly from field to field. The foreign language references were low for psychology and English (2%), slightly higher for botany, zoology, and political science (8%). The relatively highest percentages of foreign language references were found in chemistry (20%), religion (16%), and history (14%). Approximately one-third of the dissertations had no foreign references, and another 16% had only one or two. Thus, there is some use of foreign references in doctoral dissertations, but the extent of use varies from field to field, and half of the dissertations contain fewer than three references. Over half of the total number of foreign references were in 5% of the dissertations, most of which were written by students who were either foreign born or had lived or studied abroad. There is also the possibility that not all of the references cited were actually referred to.

An extensive study of post Ph.D. foreign language use was reported by Rosenzweig et al. (1962). Among psychology Ph.D.'s, 65% reported they had never used a foreign language after they received their degree, a median time of 8½ years. While the median number of foreign language articles read was zero, the mean was five, indicating a highly skewed distribution, and an average of approximately one foreign language article read every 20 months. The article in Business World reported earlier indicated that about 10% of education doctorates reported some post Ph. D. use of a foreign language for research. In contrast,

Eckert and Minnich (1954) stated that 60% of faculty members surveyed indicated that they had made some later use of the languages studied.

The studies summarized above represent most of the recent empirical studies of the prevalence and value of foreign language requirements for the Ph.D. They represent only a small sample of the published material, however. There are many articles that express strong opinions either pro or con, and cite arguments in an attempt to justify their beliefs.

Several studies indicate that the need for foreign language knowledge and the use of foreign languages varies from field to field (Eckert and Minnich, 1954; Nock, 1969). There seems to be an emphasis on foreign languages in the sciences and history, with much less perceived need for foreign language study in education, business and the social sciences.

There have been many arguments in favor of retaining, or even strengthening the language requirements. Brickman (1961), for example, maintained that there should be a language requirement in schools of education so that students can learn about the educational process in other countries. More recently, Admussen (1967) wrote that "at a time...when linguistic ability in this country is at last improving...it is ironic and lamentable that a de-emphasis is taking place at the graduate level...Someone needs to facilitate the defense, not of language requirements, but of the usefulness of language as a research tool." Language study is very useful, claim Stern and Rudowski (1968), not only because there is a distinct deficiency in available translations, but also because there is a distinct lack of available translators. They further contend that without skill in a foreign language a researcher suffers from an appreciable disadvantage in competing for research grants. They conclude that "...the level of linguistic competence should be drastically revised upward."

In contrast, Meyer (1969) noted that a strong background in computer science is probably of more value to a psychology graduate student than two foreign languages. He suggested "the adoption of a requirement of approximately five courses in lieu of both languages."

At the middle, Sherman Ross of the American Psychological Association and Charles Shilling (1966) in a letter to Science propose that "each faculty group involved in Ph. D. training analyze its area in relation to national contributions, activities, and trends, and then recommend acceptable and unacceptable foreign languages to the graduate dean."

Finally, it should be noted that the Ph.D. language requirement is often a chore rather than a major hurdle. Apparently most candidates eventually pass the exam since Tucker, Gottlieb, and Pease (1964) found that failure to pass the language examination is responsible for only 5% of the graduate school attrition.

Suggested Improvements

Recommendations for changing the language requirement center around the degree to which it should be required (previously discussed), what type of proficiency should be required, and when it should be required.

Some suggestions regarding the foreign language requirement center on the means of establishing proficiency. Marchand (1958) notes that the current tests of proficiency consist of translating passages at the rate of approximately 500 words an hour. This is unrealistic, says Marchand, "since the candidate will probably never be called upon to translate in his research; he needs merely to read and understand." Marchand suggests a reading test of a minimum of 2000 words an hour. The student would read the article in a given amount of time, being permitted to take notes and use a dictionary and a grammar book. He would then be presented with questions and would not be permitted to refer further to the article. Rosensweig, et al. (1962) suggest that the Ph.D. candidate should be required to demonstrate a high level of proficiency in one language, including the ability to speak and write as well as to read.

If there is going to be a language requirement, at what point should it be met? Waas (1953) notes that undergraduates should receive better and earlier counseling in regard to language requirements for graduate school. Rosensweig, et al. (1962) and Wood (1966) suggest that students should be required to demonstrate a foreign language proficiency prior to graduate school admission. In Wood's words, preparing the student in advance would free him for "undivided attention to advanced training and research in his chosen field."

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Appendix

New York Area Universities and Colleges Graduate Language Requirements

	Master's		Doctoral		
	Univ. Req.	Dept. Req.	Univ. Req.	Dept. Req.	Substitute Tool Permitted for One Language
Adelphi U.		1 (or 6 credits)		1 or 2	
City University		1	2		Yes
Columbia U.	0		2		Yes
Cooper Union	0		0		
Cornell U.		varies		varies	
Fairleigh Dickinson U.		varies			
Fordham U.	1		2		Yes
Long Island U.		1			
New School for Social Research	0		2		Yes
N.Y.U.		1	1	additional optional	
Pratt Inst.	0				
U. of Roch.	0			optional	
Sarah Lawrence	0				
Seton Hall U.		1		2	
St. John's U.	1		2		Yes
SUNY Albany		varies		varies	
SUNY Binghampton	0		1		
SUNY Stony Brook		varies		1 or 2	
Yeshiva-Ferkuf Grad. School	0		2		Yes

Key: 0, 1, 2--number of languages required.